

<b>Description:</b>	<p>Case study research focuses on one or more ‘cases’ in order to provide an in-depth examination and interpretation. A ‘case’ could be an individual participant or a social group (e.g. target group), an organisation (e.g. a school or college), or an event/phenomenon. The research could aim to understand that particular case (intrinsic case study), or provide an example to give insights into a wider aspect or issue (instrumental case study), or multiple cases can be used to explore similarities and differences between cases (collective case studies). Most commonly, case studies either illustrate a ‘typical’ experience, or a specific rare or unusual condition, from which conclusions can be made. Case studies are developed using different data collection and analysis techniques, because the method emphasizes triangulation of data and perspectives from a range of sources, and is usually theory-driven in that the evaluation is constructed around theoretical propositions that are tested through the study.</p>
<b>Application:</b>	<p>Proponents of case study research argue that looking at cases in an in-depth way allows researchers to describe and explore theories that underpin findings in a contextualised way which is appropriate to answer evaluation questions. Case studies can describe an event or phenomena, answer ‘how’ or ‘why’ questions relating to an observed outcome in a particular context; or be used to explore a particular practice or process in detail.</p> <p>Case studies help to inform theories and conclusions about processes and the effect of context, and can demonstrate outcomes, but are only somewhat useful in impact evaluation because of the difficulty of making general conclusions.</p>
<b>Type of evidence:</b>	<p>Usually Type 1. Case studies generate qualitative conclusions, and the findings are contextualised (although the case could include analysis of quantitative data). Case studies could potentially be used to compare pre- and post- outcomes (Type 2 or 3 depending on the study design).</p>
<b>Strengths:</b>	<p>Case studies are holistic in seeing the effectiveness of an activity as closely entwined with its physical and human context. They can offer in-depth insight because they provide detailed analysis, in context. Because different sources are used to inform the case study in an in-depth way, case studies have the potential to triangulate evidence and offer a deep level of understanding.</p> <p>Case study data collection and analysis is contextualised within a particular set of circumstances. Therefore, a case study can capture the complexities of real-life situations and can help to explore the interplay between factors and the impact of cultural conditions. Even case studies of untypical experiences are useful because they can give a useful insight into processes as well as outcomes.</p> <p>If the selection of the case studies is done objectively and can be justified, then it is possible to make inferences from case studies about what happened to bring about changes and people’s experiences, or explore what the evidence of change is and why it’s important.</p> <p>Case studies are a very flexible type of research, so can be appropriate for evolving situations.</p>
<b>Weaknesses</b>	<p>Case study methodology is criticised for providing evidence that is too specific on which to base conclusions, not generalisable, and therefore limited in terms of the contribution it can make to theory or assessment of the overall impact. Cases are selected so as to maximise what can be learnt, but this research is usually not based on representative sampling so drawing conclusions and assessing transferability of the findings can be difficult.</p>
<b>Mixed Methods</b>	<p>Case studies can be used to illustrate phenomenon described by quantitative methods. Commonly, case studies are used alongside other methods to provide a detailed description and analysis of an individual case or cases, selected to illustrate ‘typical’ experience or ‘unusual’ conditions from which conclusions can be made.</p> <p>Case studies can also be used as preliminary research to understand what might become important to look at more extensively in future more controlled research.</p> <p>Case studies are sometimes the only way to study some topics because the work is focused on a very small sample of individuals and there is insufficient scale to use other methods.</p>

Expertise:	Medium.
Requirements:	It can take time to develop a case study, and a range of research expertise are needed, because they involve integration of different types of research evidence. Sometimes they include both quantitative and qualitative research (which could include qualitative data, from interviews, focus groups or structured observation for example with quantitative data, from monitoring, objective tests or longitudinal examination over time).
Ethical considerations:	You will need to get informed consent and protect the rights of all those involved including right to anonymity and confidentiality. Ideally you should get their agreement on the case study text before it is published.
Work planning:	<p>If you are using case studies for evaluation, it's good to be clear on your research question, the hypothesis you're aiming to test or the problem you want to solve.</p> <p>The first step is to decide how you will choose the 'cases' that will offer insights into the questions under investigation. Depending on the nature of the research questions and what you want to know, you could look at similar cases (for context specific findings), a cross-section or chose cases that represent different circumstances in order to show differences.</p> <p>Then you could prepare a case study protocol specifying the data and evidence you will use. You should aim to use a range of data sources to triangulate views on the case which is important for accuracy/to avoid bias, and in order to take different explanations into account - testimonies that only include one source of evidence (e.g. a particular person's point of view) cannot be considered case studies.</p> <p>You'll usually have to collate some background information, and a description of what happened, as well as collecting qualitative feedback and people's perspectives on what happened and why (e.g. through a series of in-depth interviews).</p>
Analysis:	<p>Case studies are different from publicity and the evidence needs to be analysed and discussed objectively. It is helpful to think about the relationship between the context being represented by the case, how your interventions worked in this context, and the implications of these for the results being described.</p> <p>Make sure the analysis supports the conclusions you have drawn. If you're aiming to test a hypothesis or develop conclusions from the findings then you'll probably need to use a number of cases and will need to demonstrate how representative they are. The main part of the case study report will probably focus on in-depth descriptions rather than on statistical data.</p>
Reporting:	<p>Case studies could involve a short descriptive account or an extensive exploration over several pages. Either way, the case studies should set out the facts without making guesses, include all the data and evidence available, and give as thorough an investigation as possible. Its common to set out multiple case studies using a similar format: as a minimum you'll probably want to include an introduction to the case study; the background and context; the research you undertook and what you this told you; and any conclusions.</p> <p>You should ensure that the case study report fully sets out the set of circumstances represented so that it is clear what conclusions are being drawn and why. Using multiple case studies in a report can help to strength research findings and theories about what's important in different contexts.</p> <p>The reporting of case study research can be difficult, needs to be well thought out especially if the case studies are of individuals because it can be difficult to anonymise those involved.</p>
Useful Link(s):	<p>Yin, R. (2018) Case Study Research and Applications: Design and Methods (6th edition), London, Sage.</p> <p>Conducting Case Study Research in Sociology:  <a href="https://www.thoughtco.com/case-study-definition-3026125">https://www.thoughtco.com/case-study-definition-3026125</a></p> <p>Advice on Qualitative Comparative Analysis:  <a href="https://www.betterevaluation.org/en/evaluation-options/qualitative_comparative_analysis">https://www.betterevaluation.org/en/evaluation-options/qualitative_comparative_analysis</a></p>